

ArtReach St. Croix**Stillwater, MN****Grant request: \$15,000****Book selection:** *Station 11***Financial information:**

Previous fiscal year expenses: \$200,665

Current fiscal year expenses: \$211,764

Project information:

Proposed programming start date: 04-01-2019

Proposed programming end date: 04-30-2019

Number of partner organizations: 23

Number of book discussions: 12

Total number of events: 23

Anticipated total participants: 1,700

Please describe your community where programming will take place.

Through our work, ArtReach St. Croix connects an increasing number of people to the visual, literary and performing arts in the lower St. Croix Valley. Just east of the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, the communities of the St. Croix Valley (total population 198,730) are semi-rural and rural towns along one of America's Wild and Scenic Rivers. Our service area stretches from Taylors Falls and St. Croix Falls for 60 miles to the confluence with the Mississippi at Hastings and Prescott including: Washington, Dakota and Chisago counties in Minnesota and Polk, Pierce and St. Croix counties in Wisconsin. From our largest communities of Stillwater, MN (pop.19,300) and River Falls, WI (pop.15,300) to towns with just a few hundred residents, ArtReach builds on the notion that when we connect with community partners, we create things together none of us could do alone. In this way, we believe hosting NEA Big Read connects communities with literary arts and with each other—in a BIG way!

Why did you choose this book?

Recently, Yo-Yo Ma (aka first cello) wrote for the World Economic Forum arguing that culture plays a crucial role in global society. In his essay he states, "...humans invented culture for a reason: it gives us an evolutionary advantage. The truth is that politics, whose currency is power, and economics, whose currency is money, only get us so far. We also need culture, whose currency is trust... we [must] approach our global challenges with a more comprehensive lens, in which politics, economics and culture work in concert. It is no exaggeration to say that our survival depends on it."

It is in this spirit that our Literary Arts Committee selected STATION ELEVEN. In Mandel's novel, trust is built in a community of artists and people seek truth in a mysterious comic book. We too find hope in music, theater and fiction. If all else is stripped away, will we cling to the arts to build a common cultural language as Yo-Yo Ma suggests? In these times of mistrust, our survival may depend on it.

What are your goals for this project?

For NEA Big Read in the St. Croix Valley, our main goal is to connect often disconnected rural and semi-rural residents and readers through great literature. To do this, we will create a rich slate of multi-disciplinary programs that dive into difficult topics (preparedness for a global flu pandemic), inspire conversation (inmate art exhibit and shadow programming) and build trust through common cultural experiences (book discussions, theater attendance, youth radio). ArtReach St. Croix and our regional partners have experience in harnessing the power of NEA Big Read. We have built traction through diverse programs that reach active and reluctant readers in the St. Croix Valley. With this year's Traveling Symphony we will ensure that a major outcome is realized: to host at least one event in each town in our region. Plus, STATION ELEVEN will allow us to champion the arts as a powerful force in our region and in our global society.

Organization Description

Describe your organization's history, programming, and achievements.

Founded in 1992, ArtReach St. Croix began as the River Valley Arts Council, a grass roots organization focused primarily on the visual arts in the greater Stillwater area. It then evolved into ArtReach Alliance and began integrating the literary and performing arts, building connections with other arts organizations in the area. Over time, these connections expanded. Nearly eight years ago, conversations about ArtReach's growing role in the Valley were set in motion. This was when ArtReach St. Croix's mission of connecting communities and the arts took on a valley-wide and multi-disciplinary focus. Core ArtReach programs and services have taken shape with the goal of advancing the interconnectivity of the arts in the St. Croix Valley.

ArtReach creates partnerships, increases the visibility of the arts from Hastings to Taylors Falls in Minnesota and from Prescott to St. Croix Falls in Wisconsin. Through our programs and services, we connect an increasing number of people to the visual, literary and performing arts in the suburban and rural counties east of the Twin Cities.

We fulfill our mission through:

- 1) Arts leadership and partnership building with local Chambers, Visitors Bureaus, and organizations such as the St. Croix River Association and the National Park Service;
- 2) Marketing initiatives such as StCroixSplash.org, a regional online event calendar;
- 3) Cross-promotions such as Take Me to the River, a cooperative program connecting visitors to 12 regional art fairs and music festivals in September; and
- 4) Collaborative programming such as Valley Reads (The Big Read 2015, 2016, 2017 & 2018), the St Croix Valley's fourteen-year old version of the "One Book, One City" model of connecting communities to the literary arts.
- 5) ArtReach's newest mobile initiative, the Mobile Art Gallery "takes the show on the road" with a reimagined pull-behind trailer that can be a gallery, a performance venue or an art market stall.

Describe your organization's experience with presenting community-wide programming that demonstrates an ability to conduct a successful NEA Big Read.

Like NEA Big Read, Valley Reads was developed in response to the National Endowment for the Arts 2004 research Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America. A group of librarians, educators, writers and booksellers from the area developed the first Valley Reads, held in 2005. In doing so, we were responding to the challenge in the NEA's report, "It is time to inspire a nationwide renaissance of literary reading and bring the transformative power of literature into the lives of all citizens." ArtReach has been instrumental in the Valley Reads program since its inception. Funding from NEA Big Read has amplified the power of Valley Reads in a Big way!

Over 10 years, Valley Reads created a tradition of convening partners (bookstores, schools, book clubs, and libraries), designing a rich slate of public programs and engaging a range of host communities around a common book. As a valley-wide, multi-generational and multi-disciplinary program, we connect communities with the literary arts and with each other. In 2012, authors Nina Revoyr and Will Weaver visited for 4 days of programs at 9 locations. Programming incorporated theater with the World Premier of a stage adaptation of a short story by Weaver. In 2013, Minneapolis native Arthur Phillips discussed themes from his work including what is "real" art, what is valuable and who decides. In 2015, ArtReach and our partners hosted The Big Read with book discussions, visual arts exhibits and original theater focused around LOVE MEDICINE by Louise Erdrich. In 2016, we focused on THE GRAPES OF WRATH including mounting a full theater production and hosting a Sing-In of Dust Bowl tunes. In 2017, we went Noir with THE MALTESE FALCON hosting an exhibit of inmate art, period music from the St. Croix Jazz Orchestra in prohibition-era caves, and a lecture with scholar Julie Rivett, the author's granddaughter. In 2018, we will focus on Urrea's INTO THE BEAUTIFUL NORTH, a border story that encourages bridge building.

Organizer Biographies

Outline the key individuals who will plan and implement the programming, including their titles, anticipated roles and responsibilities in your proposed program, and experience or capacity for managing a NEA Big Read. Include partner organizations' staff as applicable.

Traci Post (Lancer-for-hire) is a YA author and freelance editor, copywriter and Literary Arts Committee member. Traci has volunteered with Big Read since 2015. She works closely with ArtReach staff, program partners and event sites. Traci recently accepted a job at Minnesota Public Radio.

Greg Seitz (Twitter Writer), ArtReach Board Member and founder of StCroix360.com, works on Big Read social media. Greg's Facebook page, The St. Croix River, has over 26,200 fans.

Jason Richards (The Bard) returned to Festival Theatre as the new Executive and Artistic Director in October 2017. He was an actor in Festival's 2004 season playing roles in A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM and THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST. Jason spent 15 years with the Texas Shakespeare Festival as an actor, director, Production Manager and playwright. BFA, Directing from Baylor and MFA, Acting from Nebraska.

Dr. Michael Osterholm (Bad News Mike) is Professor and Chair in Public Health, the director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, Professor in the Division of Environmental Health Sciences, and an adjunct in the Medical School at the University of Minnesota. He is the author of DEADLIEST ENEMY: OUR WAR AGAINST KILLER GERMS a 2017 book which details pressing infectious disease threats and prevention strategies, including global flu pandemic as a major concern. Dr. Osterholm is an international leader, guest lecturer and the author of more than 315 papers, abstracts and book chapters.

Patricia Pawlak (Transformer), Education Director at MN Correctional Facility-Stillwater, is the liaison between the Department of Corrections and NEA Big Read. Pat began working in the prison's education department in 1995 and became the director in 1999. Pat supervises literacy, career, art and higher education, as well as the prison's library. She introduced special initiatives including the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop.

Andrew Post (Magik Maker) is the author of the newly-released *Aftertaste*, critically acclaimed sci-fi thriller *Knuckleduster* and the internationally successful YA fantasy series *The Fabrick Weavers*. Andrew lives in Stillwater, MN with his wife, who is also an author, and their two dogs.

Dr. Kris Tjornehoj (Conductor) Former ArtReach board member, professor and chair of the Music Department at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Tony Bol (Culture Keeper) is the former Director of Minnesota Public Radio's Performance and Literary Programs at the Fitzgerald Theater. Now an independent contractor, Tony works with NPR to connect communities to programming, including a live event series called "Michel Martin: Going There." Tony also works with his brother Todd, founder of Little Free Library. He is in his fifth year as an Advisory Committee member for NEA Big Read.

Stephani Atkins (Podcaster) is the Founder and Director of StoryArk teaching creative writing classes for youth with novel writing, screenwriting, radio drama and poetry. Stephani's own literary art projects are realized on video, audio, web formats.

Lynne Bertalmio (Cataloger) retired Stillwater Public Library Director and Literary Arts Committee member.

Kathleen Eddy (Word Trader) Manager, Valley Bookseller and Literary Arts Committee member.

Heather Rutledge (Wrangler) ArtReach's Executive Director, will act as project lead as she has for Valley Reads 2012 & 13 and Big Read 2015-2018. Prior to joining ArtReach in 2011, Heather worked at Abington Art Center in suburban Philadelphia. She also worked with MidAtlantic Arts Foundation's Pennsylvania Performing Arts on Tour and Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance.

Syndie (Syndicator) Sorensen, ArtReach's Program and Marketing Manager will lead the marketing efforts. Syndie worked in communications at Easter Seals in Indianapolis. Prior to that she worked in Medical and Infectious Disease media relations including issuing flu season and vaccine alerts. Syndie has a MBA (marketing/communications) and a BA, Journalism.

Programming Description

Describe your programming plans in detail. Provide details on the types of activities, target audiences for those activities, locations, and intended dates. Explain how your activities will engage audiences with your selected book.

Kick-off: To share “the moments of transcendent beauty and joy” a Traveling Symphony will cover our territory. ArtReach’s Mobile Art Gallery will take the show on the road with musicians from UW-River Falls and Shakespearean actors. During the 120-mile tour, we will give away books, announce the month of programs and connect our rural and semi-rural audiences to NEA Big Read. There will be 20-minute stops in 10 locations and walking performances in 6 villages for an 8-hour tour!

Survival is insufficient, but it’s a start: Two programs address preparedness and survival. First, Dr. Michael Osterholm (aka Bad News Mike) will lead a discussion of his non-fiction book, *DEADLIEST ENEMY*, described as “a high scientific drama, a chronicle of medical mystery and discovery, a reality check, and a practical plan of action.” The focus will be on prevention strategies. Second, the St. Croix River Association, a National Park Service friends group will teach *Wilderness Survival*. Preparedness can be critical when exploring, even along the bucolic National Scenic Riverway. Swimmers and boaters are lost each year on the St. Croix. During this all-ages hands-on safety workshop kids can earn a junior ranger badge.

Inmate Art: During NEA Big Read 2017, ArtReach featured an exhibit of art by local inmates. To our surprise, there were many idyllic landscapes, soft portraits and quiet still-lives. Our visual arts committee and the education staff at Stillwater Prison are deeply committed to continued partnership. Stripped of the trappings of modern life, artists in the prison have a unique take on Dr. Eleven’s observation, “I stood looking over my damaged home and tried to forget the sweetness of life on Earth.”

Youth Radio: StoryArk students, age 12-18, will devise an original radio play with MN author Caroline Stevermer’s *RIVER RATS* as inspiration. In this futuristic fable, a generation has passed since nuclear holocaust. Young friends travel the polluted river by paddleboat, trading news and music for fuel and food. A similar scene of speculative fiction will complement StoryArk’s serial radio drama and podcast.

Far from Tame: Mandel sets her novel around the Great Lakes, a landscape similar to the shores of the St. Croix. Using *FAR FROM TAME: REFLECTIONS FROM THE HEART OF A CONTINENT* by local essayist and naturalist Laurie Allmann, we will investigate how nature “provides an alternate map of this region, charting new boundaries based on natural communities and ecosystems.” Allmann will discuss how nature would fill the gaps if human numbers are reduced.

Darkly Funny: Festival Theatre will present *MR. BURNS, A POST-ELECTRIC PLAY* where the retelling of a Simpson’s episode after humanity’s near-extinction becomes a comforting myth. Time Out NY said, this “hypnotic, sly and fiendishly insinuating play... does the improbable: It makes the end of civilization seem like the perfect time to create glowing objects of wonder and beauty.” A darkly funny entry point to the book’s themes, this play will resonate with teens and adults. Tentative venues include the ArtBarn, Marine Town Hall and Festival’s site in St. Croix Falls.

Book Groups: We will work with at least 10 of our area’s 16 libraries to host book discussions. The libraries will make individual decisions about additional titles or programs to prompt deeper conversation. We will facilitate with a comic book/graphic novel artist to connect the uninitiated to this wildly-popular genre prominent in *STATION ELEVEN*.

Shadow Big Read: Our novel is a love-letter to life on Earth. It makes sense to focus on hopeful moments that make post-apocalyptic stories bearable. However, there are others interested in discussing the darker possibilities of life after Year Zero. Local sci-fi and horror novelist Andrew Post will lead weekly shadow discussions. The group will meet to discuss topics in film, videogames and fiction, such as nuclear holocaust, climate catastrophe, alien invasion and zombies.

Partnerships Description

(a) Describe your partnerships with libraries (as applicable) and community organizations. (b) Explain the role each partner will play in your program, the activities each partner will undertake with your organization, and whether these partnerships are confirmed or pending. (c) Explain how your partnerships will allow you to reach your intended audience(s) and strengthen or build new communities around the NEA Big Read activities.

ArtReach St. Croix is a network weaver, cross-sector partner and advocate for increased visibility of visual, performing and literary arts in the St. Croix Valley. Community partnerships come in many forms. Over the years, Valley Reads (which became the NEA Big Read) received direct financial support from local businesses, promotional support from book clubs and senior centers, and built-in audiences from civic groups such as Rotary Clubs. Over the 10-year history of Valley Reads and our Big Read 2015-2018 programming, the region's library directors have offered feedback on title selection and program dates, participated in the planning committee and provided promotion in their communities. In advance of NEA Big Read programs, active involvement of regional libraries has increased and we have built a peer network across library branches in six counties and across state borders.

Common programming and several planning gatherings have resulted in collaborations to share resources and minimize duplication of efforts. Stillwater Public Library is a confirmed funder of NEA Big Read and the Library Foundation has historically supported the Stillwater events within our regional activities. The library has been a consistent program partner. Stillwater Library's new director Mark Troendle is on board while retired director Lynne Bertalmio continues to be active on the committee as she has since 2005. Located directly across the street from ArtReach, the library is often the site of author events and other tie-in programming.

Valley Bookseller in Stillwater, MN, and Chapter 2 Books in Hudson, WI, are both important partners. The independent, locally owned bookstores extend a 15% discount on the selected title and often manage the book sales at events. Valley Bookseller's manager, Kathleen Eddy is a perennial member of the committee. Valley Bookseller has also been a consistent financial supporter of ArtReach's literary arts programs.

Representatives from Stillwater Area High School and the Community Education program have been on the planning committee. We have done programming with authors at Hudson Middle School and hosted performances with students from St. Croix Falls High School. Teachers in the region are notified about the resources available on neabigread.org and student rates are available to the theater performances.

ArtReach has ongoing partnerships with St. Croix Festival Theatre, a professional theater company in St. Croix Falls, WI. ArtReach also works closely with The Phipps Center for the Arts in Hudson, WI, Belwin Nature Conservancy in Afton, MN, Great River Road Visitor Center in Prescott, WI, UW-River Falls and numerous regional libraries. These partners provide program content, promotion to their varied audiences and venues for ArtReach's regional, collaborative and multi-disciplinary programs.

ArtReach has an active network of artists who respond to our Calls for Artists and contribute to programming and events. Our networks extend to performing artists (theater, music and dance) and literary artists too. An integral part of program planning teams, over 25 volunteers spend numerous hours promoting events and helping with set-up, tear-down and hosting. Volunteers are in charge of managing the "Read & Release" program and facilitating the library book clubs.

In 2009, Todd Bol of Hudson, WI, built a model of a one room schoolhouse as a tribute to his mother, a teacher who loved to read. He filled it with books and put it on a post in his yard. Seeing that neighbors and friends loved it, he began to build more and invited others to do the same. By the summer of 2010, the international movement known as Little Free Library was born right here in the St. Croix Valley. Each Library shares the theme of exchanging good books and bringing people together. In 2016, LFL met a major milestone realizing over 50,000 Little Free Libraries in all 50 states and in 70+ countries around the world.

Promotional Description

(a) Describe how you will promote your programming. Discuss any proposed or existing partnerships with specific media outlets. (b) Explain how your program will utilize the PDF digital resources found on arts.gov and distribute copies of your reading selection.

ArtReach creates diverse communications and promotional plans with our partners. Developed by ArtReach in 2012, StCroixSplash.org is a regional online event calendar with data syndicated on 7 regional websites, dramatically increasing its visibility. In 2016 alone, Splash received 525,000 pageviews from 176,000 unique viewers. Big Read events are prominent on Splash, ArtReachStCroix.org and linked via ValleyReads.org.

NEA Big Read events will be publicized beginning in September 2018 with bookmarks distributed to thousands of residents through ArtReach booths at 12 regional art fairs and partner libraries. Next, oversized postcards, full-color posters and numerous press releases help people find out about the month of events. We use social media including Facebook, Instagram and Google Grant-funded ads. We make frequent reference to the online Reader's Resources in our targeted e-newsletters that see 45-60% open rates, well above the industry average.

ArtReach has earned regional media including in the St. Croix Valley Magazine, Women's Press, River Falls Journal, Hudson Star-Observer, Stillwater Gazette, Hastings Star Leader, New Richmond News, Prescott Journal and online outlets. Our programs are often included in the book and East Metro sections of the Pioneer Press and Star Tribune. Two regional news blogs share our event content and use Splash to feed their calendars. For a third year, we are partnering with a weekly youth radio program on KLBB-AM.

Our Read & Release book distribution program will start with the kick-off parade through our territory. The idea is explained with a prominent sticker encouraging readers to access the resources at neabigread.org and pass the book on. Some will keep the copy and others will release it at a new (and unexpected) site. With the help of St. Croix Valley-based Little Free Library, local stewards are encouraged to stock Read & Release copies. LFL's "Take a Book. Return a Book" concept is in lock-step with NEA Big Read!



St. Croix Festival Theatre
PO Box 801
125 North Washington Street
St. Croix Falls, WI 54024
Box Office 715-483-3387
FestivalTheatre.org

January 15, 2018

NEA Big Read review panel,

I am writing in support of ArtReach St. Croix and the organization's application to the NEA Big Read, a program that Festival Theatre has experienced as a key-partner in seven years including four grant years (Valley Reads 2007, 2008, 2009 and Big Read 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018). I am honored to share a few examples of the positive effect ArtReach has had on arts-related programming for the St. Croix Valley community.

Over the years, Festival Theatre has partnered with ArtReach on several projects that endeavor to bring the literary arts to life. In 2012, Festival Theatre partnered with ArtReach and area libraries in the World Premier of the locally-developed stage adaptation of a Will Weaver short story. As partners with ArtReach on the Big Read, we have produced pieces of original theatre, as well as staged successful full-stage productions of theatrical classics, including *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Real Inspector Hound*.

During NEA Big Read 2019, Festival Theatre will provide a Shakespeare ensemble for the Traveling Symphony and will present *Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play*. This funny show will provide a unique entry point to the book and the parallel themes will resonate with our audiences, including our high school groups. In *Mr. Burns*, a Simpson's episode is retold for decades after the near-extinction of humanity. The story becomes a familiar myth which comforts people still reeling from the destruction of civilization. Time Out New York said "Anne Washburn's hypnotic, sly and fiendishly insinuating play... does the improbable: It makes the end of civilization seem like the perfect time to create glowing objects of wonder and beauty."

Through the Valley Reads and the Big Read, ArtReach has proved to be an excellent network builder, finding ways to support Festival Theatre's work by engaging other organizations and involving a broader section of our community. ArtReach has a long history of successful partnership building, and this has been instrumental in helping Festival Theatre grow our outreach and deepen the impact of our work.

The Valley Reads and the Big Read are both fine examples of how ArtReach is able to develop and build an audience through multi-disciplinary programming. By connecting with organizations and playing to their individual strengths, ArtReach creates a vibrant, community-based experience that allows individuals to immerse themselves in the arts by celebrating it in a variety of unique ways. It is my pleasure to recommend ArtReach for NEA Big Read.

Sincerely,

Jason Richards
Executive Artistic Director
St. Croix Festival Theatre

STILLWATER

PUBLIC LIBRARY

224 North Third Street

Stillwater, MN 55082

January 19, 2018

National Endowment for the Arts
NEA Big Read Review Panel
400 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20506-0001

Dear NEA Big Read Review Panel,

The Stillwater Public Library looks forward to continuing our longstanding cooperative partnership with ArtReach St. Croix in anticipation of *NEA Big Read* programming in 2019. Our two organizations have collaborated for at least the past 16 years, and I'm honored to be part of the team that will help plan and implement *NEA Big Read* opportunities from start to finish in my first full year as the new library director. Our annual one community, one book program is a signature event for both of our organizations because we have shared goals of bringing people together, encouraging the joy of reading, and promoting civil discussion of literary themes to foster broader awareness and understanding. The 2018 selection of *Into the Beautiful North* is not only a powerful work of literature we will be talking about as a community, it is also timely given the political debate over economic migration. Krista Tippett, host of the public radio program and podcast *On Being*, will further broaden the scope of coverage and interest in this year's *NEA Big Read* program when she interviews the author, Luis Alberto Urrea.

Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* is the title chosen by community stakeholders for next year's *NEA Big Read*, which is most exciting. Emily has previously visited our city and gave an author talk at the Stillwater Public Library in 2015, which was very well received and provides an opportunity for us to build on that connection. *Station Eleven* will attract a diverse cross-section of readers in the St. Croix Valley who either are not yet familiar with the work or will want to read it again because the writing is that good and the themes strike an emotional chord given the times in which we live. The subject matter of Emily's book is replete with intriguing programming possibilities, too.

NEA Big Read is greatly valued and appreciated in our community. We plan to provide book club kits, facilitate book discussions, provide circulating copies of the title in any formats available to the library, host a presentation or panel discussion on the book's themes, view and discuss films with pertinent subject matter, and assist with the hosting or promotion of any theatre-related production.

The Stillwater Public Library serves residents of the city of Stillwater and six adjoining townships for a total service population of approximately 40,000. The library has a long history of adult programming with an emphasis on retirees to ensure their active participation and contribution to community life, which enriches all of us.

Sincerely,



Mark Troendle

Director, Stillwater Public Library